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11. (U) In This Issue:

- Opposition Victory Seen in Major MPLA Reversal
- And there were 14: Quick Decisions made on Party Appeals
- Constitutional Court Shakes up the Electoral Process
- Media Reaction: Local Papers Mock Small Parties'
"Disorder"

Opposition Victory Seen in Major MPLA Reversal

12. (SBU) On July 9th the MPLA abruptly abandoned its effort to impose a two-day election by amendments to the electoral law. Opposition parties and civil society hailed the shift as a major victory. The effort was initiated by President Dos Santos when he convoked the elections (Reftel C) and ordered the legislature to study whether a two-day election was required in order to guarantee all voters access to the polls. The ruling MPLA backed the two-day vote against fierce opposition from civil society and legal watchdogs. AJPD (the Association for Justice, Peace and Democracy) argued that amending the electoral law after convoking elections violated the spirit and/or letter of the law. The National Electoral Commission (CNE) also issued a carefully worded communique saying, in essence, such a change wasn't necessary.

13. (SBU) Most opposition parties, led by UNITA, also criticized the change, invoking memories of overnight ballot box tempering in the '92 elections and the more recent example of Kenya. In a July 3rd meeting with the Ambassador, UNITA President Isaias Samakuva detailed how this move threatened the credibility of the electoral process, and explained UNITA planned to boycott the National Assembly vote on the amendment should it reach the floor of the National Assembly, a strategy to embarrass the MPLA enough to bring them to the bargaining table.

14. (SBU) In the end UNITA's gambit worked. Faced with a storm of controversy, Dos Santos convened the bi-lateral commission to discuss the matter. Designed by the Lusaka Peace Accords to hammer out differences between the parties, the Commission had not met for many months despite UNITA'S calls for regular sessions during the pre-election period. Following this meeting, the National Assembly passed the July 9th resolution setting a one-day election.

And there were 14: Quick Decisions made on Appeals

15. (U) On July 28, the Constitution Court submitted the final group of 14 eligible candidate lists - 10 parties and 4 coalitions - to the National Electoral Commission (CNE). The Court quickly rejected appeals from the 20 parties deemed

ineligible to run (reftel). In statements to the press the Court has clarified that none of the ineligible parties will be proscribed; only parties which fail to meet eligibility standards in two consecutive elections will be proscribed.

16. (U) On July 29, 2008 the CNE conducted a lottery to determine the order that parties will appear on voting ballots, and the order they appear on set times on National Radio and Television. The lottery was conducted in public at the Talatona Convention Center, with representatives of political parties present to witness personally the drawing of lots. With the lottery complete, the CNE can now finalize its order with the Spanish company contracted to print the ballots (reftel A).

Constitutional Court Shakes up the Electoral Process

17. (U) Angola's new Constitutional Court has shaken up Angola's political landscape since its June 25 inauguration. While its overall mandate puts the Court in position to rule on the constitutionality of all laws, mandates, decrees and treaties, its immediate focus has been to settle a wide variety of election-related issues, including determination of the legality of political parties and their candidate lists for the September 5 legislative elections (reftel). Though the Court was sworn in a mere 13 days before the deadline for candidate submissions, the Court and its quickly-recruited staff of almost 400 rapidly set up shop. In order to cope with the onslaught on paperwork submitted by political parties to support their candidate lists, the Court instituted true rarities in the GRA: extended night and

LUANDA 00000585 002 OF 002

weekend hours to cope with the workload and a website (www.tribunalconstitutional.ao) that is frequently updated with the Court's latest decisions. All of the Courts decisions have been posted online for public review.

18. (SBU) The Court's setup is not without controversy. Some opposition and civil society leaders criticized President dos Santos's heavy hand in selecting the Court's seven members, and charged that ties to the Executive threaten the Court's independence and impartiality. The President nominated three members, including Court President Rui Ferreira, the former private legal council to President dos Santos, and Onofre Dos Santos, the CNE's General Director for Elections in the 1992. Parliament nominated three: two by the ruling MPLA and one by UNITA. The Supreme Court chose one of its members. By law, each judge serves a single seven-year term.

Media Reaction: Local Papers Mock Small Parties' "Disorder"

19. (U) Luanda's private weekly newspapers, long known to look for safe ways to knock the ruling MPLA, have lately turned a mocking eye on the inability of the majority of Angola's 96 political parties to make a legitimate run in the nation's first elections in 16 years despite the thousands of dollars they received from the GRA. "Agora" compared these parties, who long and nosily demanded up-front campaign subsidies from the government for these legislative elections, to "rats fleeing when they sense a cat." Of the 34 political entities that did submit candidate lists to the Court, "Angolense" noted the "high level of disorganization" and "true tumult" shown by most when delivering their candidates lists and supporting information, noting that some even used suitcases to transport what "seemed to be the whole world" to the Court. "A Capital" contrasted the "great fuss" that accompanied many parties' delivery of documents in "giant bags, crates, coolers, not to mention many small sacks" with the "elegance" shown by UNITA and MPLA's apparently "fuss-free" deliveries. "A Capital" concluded that "in reality, only these two parties showed they are in condition to fight one-on-one in the September 5 elections."

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